



Plenty of life in Chandrabhanu show

By Heidi Munan

THE audience had been warned not to expect a story line or any particular "message" from *Corrugated*, a dance performance put on by Unimas under the direction of distinguished choreographer Chandrabhanu.

As shows go it was almost a spur-of-the-moment production, conceived, rehearsed and staged within a few weeks!

"Of course we would have liked more time," the director admitted. "*Corrugated* is a complex, demanding work; we were at it day and night!"

But he was pleased with the way his performers acquitted themselves, comparing their standard with the programmes of "community dancing" for amateurs with widely differing backgrounds and skills which he sometimes produces in Australia.

"We developed the concept of *Corrugated* together," says Chandrabhanu. "The students tried to find the link between dance and the community. There used to be such a connection; in many cultures dance was part of religious rites. But today we must ask ourselves: do we dance for ourselves, or for the onlookers? What audience are the over-acted, over-painted cultural shows aimed at?"

The title, *Corrugated*, refers to the surface of a complex social issue: the urban-rural migration, the squatters living on the fringes of modern towns, the rural folks replacing



SPLENDID PERFORMANCE ... Chandrabhanu (in front) joined the dancers on stage for the finale

their traditional house forms. It is about displacement, about changes in the life and the soul of a nation.

Corrugated was presented to the public at the Experimental Theatre of Unimas on Dec 7. There was an impromptu air about the show: plenty of life in it but the edges a bit raw, valid ideas not quite worked out in detail yet. What, for instance, was a splendid set of polished brass gamelan on ornate stands doing in the midst of Khairul Aidil Azlin's set of rusty, corrugated, packing-crates urban poverty? Were the demure instrumentalists attired in silk batik intended as a metaphor

for the comfortable middle class, unaware of the squalor just a stone's throw away?

The show opened with a moving lullaby sequence, a very simple motif skilfully developed for piano (Chong Pek Lian), violin (Arthur Liaw) and trombone (Gila Rayberg). The dancers were strong on rhythm but ragged in their motions, whether they were derived from traditional dance or featured the outstretched open hands that seem to be a signature of modern dance.

As the choreographer stressed in his introductory remarks, there is no story line in *Corrugated*; the experience just washes over the

audience like the surf, wave after wave.

The segment entitled *The River* abounded in "water" images: rippling waves were projected on the screen, girls poured water into basins to make it gurgle, the cast sat in a row, industriously paddling their hands in the air while enumerating all kinds of "water". This sequence is a good illustration of an original idea not yet fully thought out: like the car chase in a gangster film, it was too long.

Audience interest was aroused, peaked, and waned but still they were at it, to end finally with "tear drops" and dissolve into a melancholy of thirst. They swam, they paddled, they staked, they indulged in happy childhood pastimes by the river to an idyllic tune adapted from a Kenyah lullaby and embellished with "water" motifs for piano, violin and flute.

Corrugated featured a choir with some good voices, but the singers, like the dancers, haven't had time to fuse yet. Sadly they sang their lullaby while three junkies staggered drunkenly through the dancing girls of their dreams, pursued by their own demons, chasing their own illusions.

The Experimental Theatre is of the right size for

this sort of a performance. Nobody is tempted to use microphones, the performers are close enough to the audience for immediate appeal; some lucky ones in the front row got a splash or two of water from the "river".

A martial third act with much drumming and marching built up to the questions whither?, whose?, and came to the conclusion that nothing is anybody's, not even the clothes on their backs. This led to a striking denouement and just for once the term is justified — the dancers, some stripped to the waist, others dressed in white, drifted into a world of dappled shadows projected onto the stage.

The swinging cradle floated down into the scheme of things again; a wake was held over a body laid out on a mat; the pulse of the drums was taken up and finally superseded by the rhythmic clapping of plastic water bottles and hands — birth and death, beginning and end, the cycle goes on and on and on.

Most of *Corrugated* was danced by the whole corps. No "star" was singled out though it was obvious who were the experienced dancers (Chandrabhanu himself joined the cast for the last section) and who the novices; the performers appeared to enjoy themselves in a solemn way which is a good way to put life into any performance.